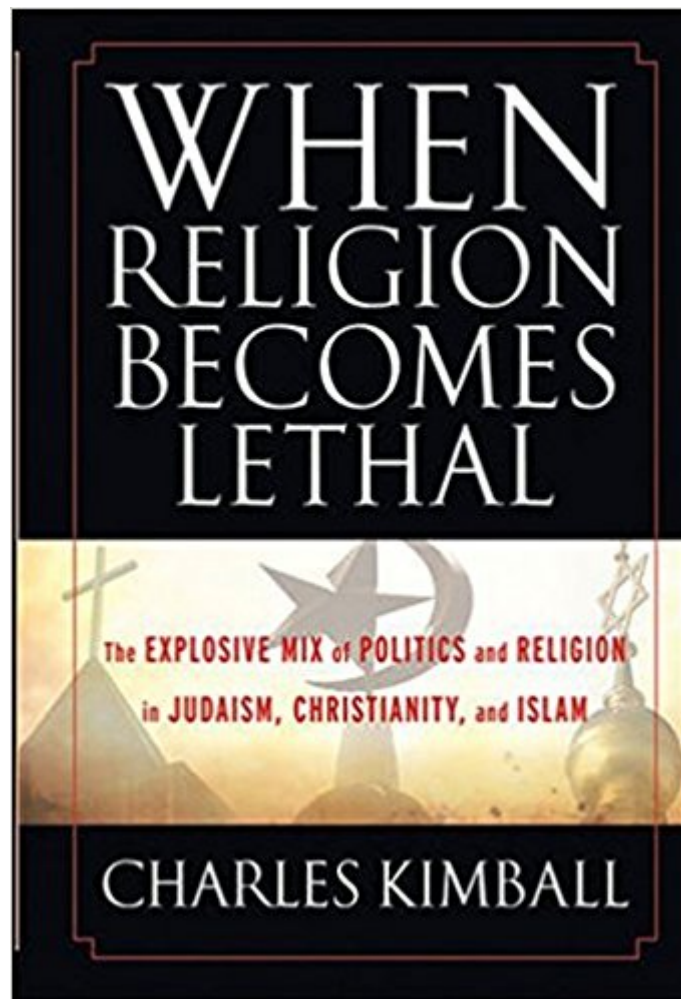


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When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix Of Politics And Religion In Judaism, Christianity, And Islam



Synopsis

A compelling look at today's complex relationship between religion and politics. In his second book, bestselling author Charles Kimball addresses the urgent global problem of the interplay between fundamentalist Abrahamic religions and politics and moves beyond warning signs (the subject of his first book) to the dangerous and lethal outcomes that their interaction can produce. Drawing on his extensive personal and professional knowledge of, experience with and access to all three traditions, Kimball's explanation of the multiple ways religion and politics interconnect within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will illuminate the problems and give readers a hopeful vision for how to chart a safer course into a precarious future. Kimball is the author of *When Religion Becomes Evil*, one of the most acclaimed post 9/11 books on terrorism and religion. Reveals why religion so often leads to deadly results. The author has scholarly knowledge and expertise and extensive personal experience with the peoples, cultures, and leaders involved. Readable and engaging, this book gives a clear picture of today's complex political and religious reality and offers hope for the future.

Author Q&A with Charles Kimball

Author Charles Kimball How did you become interested and involved in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations? I've always been interested in religion, maybe because I'm kind of a mix--my paternal grandfather was Jewish, and while my immediate family was Christian, a large portion of the extended family was Jewish. While I grew up thinking that both Judaism and Christianity were great traditions, I soon learned that not everyone in Tulsa, OK, agreed. As I encountered ignorance about and prejudice toward Jews, I wanted to know why and wanted to know more about what religion was all about. Eventually when I began my doctoral program at Harvard, I decided that I wanted to study the religious, historical, and political interplay between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Why were you so interested in those three monotheistic religions? My wife and I lived in Egypt (one block from the now famous Tahrir Square) when I was a young scholar, and I was directly involved in the Iranian hostage conflict during the Carter administration, as I describe in the book. Those life-changing experiences ignited my efforts to understand the dynamics of religion and politics in the contemporary Middle East. The combination of some 40 trips to the Middle East and my observations of developments in Israel and the emerging influence of conservative Christians in the U.S. highlighted the often convoluted, confusing, and lethal mixture of religion and politics. It's been made painfully clear that even small numbers of religious zealots or extremists claiming inspiration from their religion can wreak havoc on a regional or even global scale. In the second decade of the 21st century, the stakes are far too high for us to avoid or underestimate the volatile mix of religion and politics. What's the most important thing people need to know to better understand the often confusing and clearly

explosive mix of religion and politics in the Middle East and U.S. today? We get a lot of our information about the dizzying swirl of recent events from religious leaders, politicians, and punditsâoften packaged in superficial sound bites. For most Americans today, this has produced a kind of âdetailed ignoranceâ of Islam, the Middle East and the interplay of religion and politics. We have a lot of details and images but no framework for understanding. It might take some effort to develop such a framework, but itâs far less daunting than you might imagine. If we look at the scriptural bases for each tradition and their historical origins and relationships, we can see that there isnât actually a fixed template for how they operate and interact. But we can see clearly the dangerous and often deadly results of fundamentalists in all three religions, people who claim that they know precisely what God requires for them and everyone else. Itâs always a âwork in progress.â

Are the dramatic developments in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and other predominantly Muslim countries in 2011 a source of hope or cause for alarm? Although our âdetailed ignoranceâ tends to make us lump all these countries together, they are all different and distinctive. Tunisia is not Jordan; Egypt is not Syria. At the same time, there are common themes that connect the turbulent upheavals. While there are no easy answers or simple solutions, the book identifies resources and opportunities for people of faith and goodwill to help fashion a more hopeful future. When Religion Becomes Lethal identifies whatâs wrong or dangerous in order to point out healthy alternatives. Many of the key issues surfacing today are discussed in the bookâfrom the major sources of anger and frustration in many predominantly Muslim countries and the ways the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exacerbates problems throughout the region to the constructive and misguided ways U.S. policies have shaped and will shape events. In addition, as we demystify catch phrases like the so-called âclash of civilizationsâ and clarify what actually constitutes âshariâah law,â we can identify more positive ways to embrace the challenges in the U.S. and in the Middle East that loom before us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who watches CNN, FOXNews, or MSNBC should read this book. In fewer than 200 pages, Kimball leads his readers from the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the latest disputes over Jewish settlements in the occupied territory of Palestine, Christian opposition to the construction of an Islamic center in Manhattan, and the bizarre rants of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Real people--militant Muslims, cocksure Christians, and hard-core Jewish settlers "prepared to facilitated the final conflagration"--populate these pages. Kimball goes behind the news-media and talk-show sound bites to reorient popular perspectives on major events and introduce important players in the interaction of religion and politics among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For example, the widespread talk of a "clash of civilizations" among scholars and the public alike "reinforces a simplistic and dangerously inaccurate perspective." Support for Israel among American politicians is entirely understandable if for no other reason than "Criticizing Israel has been political suicide in the United States." As for September 11, 2001, "the world did not change on that fateful day. On that day, the United States of America simply joined the rest of the world, in a disturbing way. . . . The lethal threat posed by violent extremists claiming inspiration from their religion and prepared to die in suicidal self-sacrifice was [now] just as real in the United States as it had been in Beirut or Jerusalem.

This book tackles two topics that - over the years - we have been advised as follows: "Whatever you do, stay away from religion and politics in conversations." The author, Charles Kimball, Th.D., is an ordained Baptist minister and professor and director of religious studies at the University of Oklahoma. His family background includes Jewish grandparents. He is well traveled, including time spent on the ground in the Middle East - Iran, Israel, and various Arab nations. He is qualified to write about his topic and includes references in his book to parts of the Bible that bear upon today's corruption of some believers in the three monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - such that the corrupted believer will conspire to take the lives of innocents through acts of terrorism in order to advance a political or theocratic goal. I found the book of value to me in several areas: 1)

An abbreviated history of the Jewish State of Israel and the evolution of the Settlements in the midst of occupied territory captured in the 1967 war. 2) A summation of the Koran and the history of Islam and the rise of the Sunni and Shiite factions and the Wahhabism belief that led up to Al Qaeda. 3) The principles and practices of Christian Fundamentalism and how certain believers influence U.S. policy in the Middle East. The book barely touches upon many of the topics covered and is, in this regard, a good synopsis for further study - and the author does provide ample references for the reader who wishes to learn more about the factors in organized religion that can lead to lethal consequences in today's world.

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